

## ***PAULINE CHURCH DISCIPLINE***

By D. R. HALL

Within the last hundred years it has come to be generally accepted that the severe letter, written with many tears, to which Paul refers in 2 Corinthians, cannot be 1 Corinthians. This view is based on three main contentions:

Firstly, that the opponents Paul faces in 2 Corinthians are Jews claiming to be apostles, who have come from elsewhere, but there is no trace of these opponents in 1 Corinthians.

Secondly, that the references in 2 Corinthians to his previous dealings with the Corinthian church require us to assume an intermediate visit and letter between the two canonical letters.

Thirdly, that within 2 Corinthians the emotional tone of chapters 1-7 and of chapters 10-13 makes it difficult to regard both sections as belonging to one letter, or either as related to the same situation as 1 Corinthians.

In reply to these contentions, I shall seek to show:

Firstly, that in both 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul faces the same opponents.

Secondly, that the references in 2 Corinthians to an offender, a severe letter, and other matters are references to 1 Corinthians.

Thirdly, that in dealing with the Corinthians Paul applies a consistent method of church discipline, which accounts for the difference in emotional tone between the different sections of the two letters.<sup>1</sup>

\* Delivered at Tyndale House, Cambridge, in July, 1968.

<sup>1</sup> The *literary* arguments for and against the unity of 2 Corinthians are not considered here; they are well discussed, and the unity defended, by P. E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London (1962) xxi-xxxv. Scholars who dispute the unity of 2 Corinthians commonly agree that the same opponents are referred to in the different parts—see for example D. Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief*, Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, Neukirchen-Vluyn (1964) 219f.

## I. PAUL'S OPPONENTS

In this section nine characteristics of Paul's opponents which are common to both epistles are discussed.

(a) *Apostleship*

Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians were 'false apostles . . . who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ' (11:13). They claimed to belong to Christ (10:7), and to be the ministers of Christ (11:23), possessing that authorization by Christ which was the basis of apostolic authority.<sup>2</sup> Like all apostles, their commission involved travel from one place to another, and they had evidently come to Corinth from elsewhere (11:4). Had they come to Corinth after 1 Corinthians was written, or is there evidence of their activity in 1 Corinthians itself?

At first sight, the troubles in 1 Corinthians seem to stem from the four parties—of Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ—mentioned in 1:11. But four distinct viewpoints cannot be found in the rest of the letter, and scholars who have sought them have reached very different conclusions. As Hurd says: 'Scholars have difficulty in characterising the position of more than one party (however it be conceived or named) in opposition to Paul. Thus although these scholars differ widely in their conclusions, their work taken as a whole implies that the major division lay not between two (or more) Corinthian parties, but between Paul and the Corinthian church.'<sup>3</sup>

Similarly Munck regards the Corinthian church as 'a church without factions'.<sup>4</sup> The party spirit was based mainly on the comparative eloquence of the party-leaders (as is indicated by the close connection between party spirit and wisdom of words in I Cor. 1, 2); but so far as theology was concerned, Paul regarded the gnostic-antinomian errors as held by the church as a whole, and therefore common to all the parties. He brings in the names of Apollos and Peter not because they had any connection with the real party-leaders, but as a kind of disguise:<sup>5</sup> 'these things', he writes, 'I have transferred in a figure to myself and Apollos, so that you may learn by us . . . so that

<sup>2</sup> *TWNT* I s.v. ἀπόστολος.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, SPCK, London (1965) 117.

<sup>4</sup> J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, SCM, London (1959) 135.

<sup>5</sup> F. Field, *Notes on the Translation of the New Testament*, Cambridge University

you may not be puffed up in favour of one man against another' (4:6). The argument is *a fortiori*: if it would be wrong for you to boast of party-leaders like Paul and Apollos, how much worse it is to divide the church in support of your present party-leaders.

The mention of Paul, Peter and Apollos, therefore, does not help us to answer the question whether the party-leaders at Corinth were natives of Corinth, or travelling preachers from elsewhere; but there are three passages which suggest that the latter alternative is the more likely:

1. In 2:1-5 Paul describes how he 'came to them' without wisdom of words, but in fear and trembling. Since he is here contrasting himself with others who boast of their wisdom of words, his coming to them in fear and trembling is probably parallel to their coming to them with boldness and eloquence.

2. In chapter 3 Paul compares the church to a building, of which he laid the foundation, but on which others are building. 'Let each one consider how he builds', he writes, implying that there were several of these other builders. These teachers were raising a superstructure of their teachings on the foundation laid by Paul. It is easier to imagine apostles from elsewhere claiming this kind of authority than members of the local church.

3. In both chapter 9 and chapter 15 Paul affirms his apostleship, which was evidently being questioned at Corinth. The most natural reason for the Corinthians to question Paul's apostleship would be the existence of rival apostles.

These arguments are far from conclusive; but they do suggest, what in a cosmopolitan city like Corinth one would anyhow expect, that the unnamed party-leaders to whom Paul refers through his disguise in the first four chapters, were probably visitors from elsewhere, such as we meet in 2 Corinthians.

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Press (1899) 169, 'instead of "in a figure" the meaning of the apostle would be best conveyed to the English reader by the expression "by a fiction". μετασχηματίζειν τι is *to change the outward appearance of anything*, the thing itself remaining same. E.g. 1 Sam. xxviii. 8: "Saul *disguised himself* (Sym. μετασχημάτισεν ἑαυτόν) and put on other raiment." i Ki. xiv. 2: "And Jeroboam said unto his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and *disguise thyself* (Theod. μετασχημάτισον σεαυτόν) that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam." The verb μετασχηματίζω defined in *TWNT* as 'umgestalten, verwandeln, umformen, die äussere Erscheinung einer Pers oder einer Sache ändern'. Its only other occurrence in the New Testament is 2 Cor. 11:14, where Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

(b) *Payment*

In 2 Corinthians 11 the question of apostleship is related to payment or support by the church. It is between verse 5 (where Paul compares himself with the 'super-apostles') and verse 13 (where he refers to the 'false apostles') that he talks about his 'sin' in taking no payment from the church. His opponents wanted the earnings of an apostle to be the measure of his apostleship—they were in his opinion 'hawkers of the word of God' (2:17). Paul's aim was to give no opportunity to those who wanted to appear to be like him (11:12)—*i.e.* to disprove the apostolic claims of his opponents by proving that apostleship was measured in terms of service, not of reward.

Paul's 'defence to those who judge me' in 1 Corinthians is in similar terms. Before making the main point of the chapter (that he had voluntarily foregone the privileges to which he was entitled as an apostle), he spends eleven verses arguing that despite his economic independence he is a genuine apostle. It would be natural for some Corinthians who disliked Paul's teaching to dispute his authority on theological or historical grounds; but the fact that the main dispute centres on economic factors is hard to explain unless they knew of other, paid, apostles, with whom Paul was being compared.<sup>6</sup>

It was this economic rivalry of the party-leaders that led to divisions in the common meal which constituted the Lord's Supper, at which the rich got drunk and the poor went hungry (11:21). J. Munck compares them to the Greek sophists, many of whom were of noble birth and charged high fees to their pupils.<sup>7</sup> Like the sophists, these men taught only those who could afford to pay; the followers of the various teachers ate the Lord's Supper meal in their own groups, and the poor were left out. Thus they 'humiliated those who had nothing' (11:22). This helps to explain Paul's insistence that he would not be supported by the church and become, like his opponents, merely a party-leader for those who could afford to pay him.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Hurd (*op. cit.*, 126) takes the right to eat and drink in 9:4 to be a reference to idol-meats, not to payment by the church. This may be true to the general context of chapters 8-10, but the immediate context of 9:3-11 is all concerned with the right to be paid. If, as Hurd says (108ff.), Paul's apostolic status is not in question, why does he defend it so vehemently?

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, 162 n. 2.

(c) *The Signs of an Apostle*

In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul argues that he has performed 'the signs of an apostle', viz. signs and wonders and mighty works. The ability to work miracles was regarded by his opponents as proof of apostleship. Since they sought a proof that Christ spoke through him, he threatened to give them one, when he punished the unrepentant Corinthians on his next visit—possibly on the lines of the blinding of Elymas (13:3). But his main reply to the demand for miraculous signs is that the sign of a true apostle is weakness, not strength. The proof that he is a 'minister of Christ' is the catalogue of afflictions in 12:23-33. If he must boast (to counter the claims of his opponents) he will boast of his weakness (12:30).

We find a similar contrast between the weakness of the true apostle and the strength of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4. The Corinthians have become kings in his absence (verse 8); they have become puffed up with the thought that he was too afraid of them to pay them a visit (verse 18). The apostles, however, are treated like the offscouring of the earth (verse 13). In brief, 'we are weak, but you are strong' (verse 10). The contrast 'weak apostles: strong Corinthians' in the first letter is parallel to the contrast 'weak true apostles: strong false apostles' in the second letter. This is most probably because this exaltation of strength, exhibited by mighty works, was an idea which had been brought to Corinth by Paul's opponents before the writing of 1 Corinthians, and was the cause of that strength of the church as a whole which he rebukes in the fourth chapter of that letter.

(d) *Boasting*

In 2 Corinthians Paul faces the charge that he is mad; and this charge of madness is connected with his boasting.<sup>8</sup> 'Receive me, mad as I am, so that I also may boast a little', he asks (1:16); and when his boasting is over, he comments: 'I have been mad—you forced me' (12:11). At first sight it seems odd that his opponents should accuse him of madness because of his boast-

<sup>8</sup> It is clear from 11:1 that the theme of madness is based on a charge made by his enemies. ὄφελον with the imperfect indicative expresses an unfulfilled wish in present time—'I wish you were willing to endure my madness, though in fact you are not,' See Arndt s.v. ὄφελον.

ing. They believed in boasting. They commended themselves, brought letters of commendation from other churches, and vied with each other in demonstrating the signs of an apostle. The bare fact that Paul boasted would not be regarded by them as madness; rather, it was Paul's paradoxical manner of boasting. While they boasted of how much payment they received, he boasted of receiving nothing. While they boasted of their strength, he boasted of his weakness. This apparently mad reversal of normal values is the main theme of chapter 11. You call my values mad, he writes, but I wish you would accept them (verse 1); for I am afraid that you may be corrupted from the simplicity of Christ (verse 3) by teachers who boast of external things (verse 18), and want me to be valued at the market price just as they are (verse 12). Since you like boasting, I will boast too, though you think my type of boasting is foolish (verse 16). Listen to all I have suffered. If I must boast, I will boast of the things which concern my weakness (verse 30).

Paul's boasting of his weakness is a prominent theme of chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians, and his boasting of the fact that he receives nothing in return for his preaching is a prominent theme of chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians. The charge of madness was therefore most probably the reaction of the Corinthians, reported by Titus, to this boasting in 1 Corinthians.<sup>9</sup>

(e) *Eloquence*

In 2 Corinthians Paul faces the charge that he is unskilled in speaking (11:6). His letters, it was alleged, were strong and weighty, but his physical presence was weak and his speech contemptible (10:10). This could scarcely mean that Paul was not able to preach a good sermon.<sup>10</sup> It means that he was not an orator of the classical pattern. His words were simple and practical, whereas his opponents were accomplished orators. Similarly in 1 Corinthians Paul rebukes the Corinthians for

<sup>9</sup> So E. H. Plumptre in *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, ed. C. J. Ellicott, Cassell, London (1884), commenting on 2 Cor. 11:1; 'it is impossible to resist the inference that here also we have the echo of something which Titus had reported to him as said by his opponents at Corinth. Their words, we must believe, had taken some such form as this: "We really can bear with him no longer; his folly is becoming altogether intolerable".'

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Acts 14:12, where the men of Lystra called Paul Hermes 'because he was the chief speaker'.

their excessive valuation of wisdom; and there is, as Barrett says, 'a considerable group of passages where σοφία denotes a kind of eloquence, a technique for persuading the hearer'.<sup>11</sup> The reason why Paul stresses that he preached without lofty and impressive words of wisdom must have been the existence at Corinth of orators such as we meet in the second letter.

(f) *Gnostic Dualism*

In 2 Corinthians 11:5, 6 Paul, comparing himself with the 'super-apostles', claims that though unskilled in speaking he is not unskilled in knowledge (γνῶσις). The point is not elaborated in that letter, but there is an interesting parallel in Corinthians 2, where Paul criticizes the wisdom of the Corinthians, but affirms that he also teaches wisdom among the perfect. The word σοφία here refers not to oratorical technique, but to the doctrine which is taught. In 2:8 σοφίαν is the object of the verb γινώσκω—γνῶσις meaning the state of knowing and σοφία that which is known. By his claim to σοφία in I Corinthians and his claim to γνῶσις, in 2 Corinthians Paul is saying to his opponents: 'You claim to be "gnostics", but I am a better gnostic than you are.'

One feature of this 'gnosticism' was a dualistic anthropology, which appears in two issues—fornication and resurrection.

Firstly, the issue of fornication is common to both letters. In 2 Corinthians 12:19-21 Paul explains why he has been defending himself: he fears that on his next visit he may find party spirit and immorality. But it is in I Corinthians 6 that we see the arguments by which the Corinthians justified fornication. 'All sin', they said, 'is outside the body'—*i.e.* sin is spiritual, whereas fornication is physical.<sup>12</sup> This distinction between body and spirit, so typical of gnostic ideas, can lead to either ascetism or sexual licence, and both points of view were represented at Corinth. In chapter 6 he faces an antinomian justification of fornication; but in chapter 7 he is replying to the ascetic slogan of verse 1: 'it is not good for a man to touch a woman'.<sup>13</sup> It may be, as Max Thurian suggests, that both points of view stem from the same basic anthropological dual-

<sup>11</sup> C. K. Barrett, *BJRL* 46 (1964) 269ff.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, 67f., lists many scholars who believe that Paul is quoting here the slogans of his opponents.

<sup>13</sup> See J. C. Hurd, *loc. cit.*, and H. Chadwick, *NTS* 1 (1954-5) 261-275.

ism of the Corinthian gnostics;<sup>14</sup> or the ascetic point of view may have been a reaction against the prevailing antinomianism by the minority who rejected it.

Secondly, the dualism of Paul's opponents also forms the background to his eschatological statement in 2 Corinthians 5:4: 'we do not wish to be stripped naked, but to put on further clothing.' Paul is here contrasting the dualistic view of his opponents (that after death the soul is released from the body and becomes naked) with his own view, previously expressed in I Corinthians 15, that after death we shall be clothed with a resurrection body. As Bultmann says:

'The arguments of 5:1ff. contain indirect polemic against a Gnosticism which teaches that the naked, self soars aloft free of any body. The Christian does not desire, like the Gnostics, to be "unclothed", but desires to be "further clothed."' <sup>15</sup>

This resurrection faith of Paul and his colleagues, described in 2 Corinthians 5, is based on the theology of I Corinthians 15; and probably the 'some' who are described as having 'no knowledge of God' in verse 34 of that chapter are the same false apostles against whom he wages his indirect polemic in 2 Corinthians 5.

#### (g) *Spirituality*

In 2 Corinthians 11:4 Paul accuses his opponents of imparting 'another spirit'. Their spirituality consisted partly in ecstatic experiences, and partly in a claim to prophetic utterance as the mouthpieces of Christ. The former element appears in chapter 12, where Paul shows that as far as visions and revelations are concerned he is more of a 'spiritual man' than they are. The latter element is implied in their demand of a proof that Christ spoke through Paul (13:3).

<sup>14</sup> M. Thurian, *Marriage and Celibacy*, SCM, London (1959) 64..

<sup>15</sup> R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I*, SCM, London (1952) 202, quoted by P. E. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 170. This state of nakedness is sometimes taken to be the state of the soul between death and the parousia, from which Paul shrinks. But the state of being 'away from the body and present with the Lord' is not one from which Paul shrinks, but which he welcomes (verse 8). This passage is not concerned with the question of *when* we receive our new bodies (at death or at the parousia), but with the sure and certain hope that one day we shall receive them. This certainty is expressed by the emphatic words οἶδαμεν (verse 1) εἶ γαρ (verse 3) and the ἀρραβών, metaphor in verse 5. See M. Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1962) 82ff., who demonstrates that εἶ γαρ expresses assurance, not doubt.

We find the same two forms of spirituality in I Corinthians. The trouble Paul faces in chapters 12-14 is partly an overvaluation of speaking in tongues, and in his usual way Paul shows that he is in this respect more of a spiritual man than they are (14:18), while at the same time devaluing this form of spirituality. But the main opposition from spiritual men in 1 Corinthians seems to take the form of a claim to prophetic inspiration. 'If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord' (14:37). Paul here pits his authority against the prophetic authority claimed by his opponents. Similarly at the end of chapter 7 he states that he also (like his opponents) has the Spirit of God.<sup>16</sup> These passages, like 2 Corinthians 13:3, imply that Paul's opponents were arguing: 'Why should you listen only to Paul? We have the Spirit; listen to us.'

(h) *Jewish Birth*

Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians boasted of their Jewish descent—they were Hebrews and children of Abraham (11:22).<sup>17</sup> They were not, however, Judaizers, like the false teachers in Galatia, for there is no mention of legalism in Paul's attack on them. To discover why they boasted of their Jewish origin, we must turn to chapters 3 and 4. These chapters form part of Paul's defence of the ministry of himself and his colleagues.<sup>18</sup> In two respects this ministry is superior to the Old Testament ministry of Moses:

1. The Jews were not, and are not, able to understand God's revelation. Moses put a veil on his face so that the sons of Israel should not see his glory; and the same veil is still present when Moses is read in the Jewish synagogues. The veil is removed when a man turns to Christ and finds the liberty of the Spirit, whereby 'we all' can see the glory of the Lord face to face (3:12-18). Understanding the Old Testament is not the prerogative of Jews. It is the gift of God to every believer in Christ.

<sup>16</sup> This 'also' in the word *καὶ γὰρ*, is curiously omitted in RSV, but translated in NEB.

<sup>17</sup> D. Georgi, *op. cit.*, 51ff., argues that these Jewish titles refer mainly to spiritual values; but comparison with Phil. 3:4ff. suggests that it is mainly the prestige value of Jewish birth that is at issue.

<sup>18</sup> The 'we' of chapters 1-7 is defined in 1:19 as 'Silvanus and Timothy and I'—see p. 22 below.

2. The veil symbolizes secrecy. Even though the glory on Moses' face was only a fading glory, the Jews were not allowed to see it. But Christians can all see the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. Therefore, says Paul, we Christian ministers have renounced the hidden things of shame and do not handle the word of God deceitfully, but make the truth manifest to every man's conscience (4:1, 2). This Section echoes the contrast of 2:17 between Paul and his colleagues, who are 'men of sincerity', and their opponents, who are 'peddlers of God's word'. The commercial value of the word they preached lay in its secrecy, which could only be divulged to the initiated who paid for the privilege.

Paul's opponents were probably Hellenistic Jews, who based their teaching on an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup> As Lake has pointed out, 'the' evidence of Philo is explicit that there were Jews who had entirely abandoned the practical observance of the Law, and gave it a wholly symbolical meaning'; and the close connection between dispersion Judaism and Gnosticism has been demonstrated by the Nag Hammadi documents.<sup>20</sup> When we turn to 1 Corinthians, there is no explicit reference to the Jewish origin of the party-leaders; but there are two probable hints of their method of exegesis:

I. In chapter 2 Paul talks of the wisdom which only spiritual men can receive, and which he only speaks among the perfect. This designation of some Christians as spiritual and perfect must have been borrowed from the vocabulary of his opponents: it is not his habit to distinguish different grades of Christian.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Paul's opponents described their followers as 'perfect' implies that their wisdom was the kind of secret teaching imparted to the initiate which lies behind 2 Corinthians 4.

2. In 4:6 Paul says that the aim of his argument so far has been 'that you may learn . . . the principle "not beyond what is written", that you be not puffed up in favour of one man

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D. Georgi, *op. cit.*, 82: 'Funktions- und Herkunfts-bezeichnungen dei Gegner des Paulus wiesen bereits in diese geistige Welt des hellenistischer Judentums.'

<sup>20</sup> K. Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St Paul*, Rivingtons, London (1927) 227 R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Oxford University Press (1959).

<sup>21</sup> In Phil. 3, where he uses the word 'perfect' in a similar polemical context he insists on applying it either to all Christians (verse 5) or to none (verse 12).

against another'. Their support of the party-leaders infringed the principle (or proverbial saying) 'not beyond what is written.'<sup>22</sup> If 'what is written' is the Old Testament Scripture (the meaning of γέγραπται in its thirty other occurrences in Paul's letters), it implies that the party-leaders taught something over and above the Old Testament Scripture. This could well be the allegorical Old Testament exegesis (or eisegesis) of the apostles of 2 Corinthians.

(j) *Apostolic Qualifications*

The background to 2 Corinthians 10-13 is the charge of Paul's opponents that because of his dishonesty, physical weakness, feeble speech, lack of love in refusing to accept any payment, and mental derangement, Paul was not qualified to be an apostle. The concept of apostolic qualification is expressed by the word δόκιμος and its cognates, which occur frequently in the Corinthian letters.<sup>23</sup> In 2 Corinthians 13, in response to the demand for proof (δοκιμή) that Christ spoke through him, Paul says that he will indeed show his apostolic authority in the punishment of the unrepentant on his next visit (verses 2f.), but the real qualification for an apostle is strength through weakness, and he hopes that they will realize that he is not disqualified (verse 6). His main fear is that by not remaining in the faith, they may be disqualified as Christians (verse 5). He prays that they may repent, not because he wants to demonstrate his own qualifications, but because he wants them to do the right even if he still appears to be unqualified (verse 7). The basic principle he has stated earlier in chapter 10—that a man is δόκιμος not because of his boasting in his own qualifications, but only if he is commended by God (10:18).

The same interest in qualification appears in 1 Corinthians. In chapter 9 Paul renounces the material benefits to which he was entitled as an apostle and disciplines his body, lest despite all his preaching he prove ἀδόκιμος (verse 27). In 11:19 he writes that there must be factions at Corinth in order that the δόκιμοι among them may be recognized. This is an ironical statement (Paul did not really believe in the necessity of fac-

<sup>22</sup> The origin of the saying is obscure. It represented Paul's own attitude (cf. Acts 26:22), but he quotes it as though it were a popular proverb.

<sup>23</sup> The words δόκιμος, ἀδόκιμος and δοκιμή occur eleven times in the Corinthian letters, and six times in Paul's other letters to churches.

tions!). He means that when there are so many people claiming apostolic qualifications in rivalry to each other, the inevitable result is factions. The real test, however, of whether a Christian teacher is qualified or not will be the last judgment, when the fire will test (δοκιμάσει) every man's work (3:13).

(k) *Summary*

We have seen that the main features of Paul's opponents and their claims and accusations in 2 Corinthians appear also in Corinthians, though he only refers to his opponents in that letter under the disguise described in 4:6. There are two fresh accusations which appear for the first time in 2 Corinthians, but both of them are made in response to 1 Corinthians 16. The charge of fickleness (2 Cor. 1:12ff.) was based, as we shall see later, on 1 Corinthians 16:5ff.;<sup>24</sup> and the charge of extortion (2 Cor. 7:2 and 12:16-18) was based on Paul's advice about the collection in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and the attempt of Titus to organize the collection. This close correspondence between the two epistles creates at least a *prima facie* presumption that they are both dealing with the same opponents.

## 2. HISTORICAL REFERENCES IN 2 CORINTHIANS

Secondly I shall examine the references in 2 Corinthians to a previous letter and visit, and argue that the letter is 1 Corinthians, the visit took place before 1 Corinthians, and thus there is no need to posit an intermediate visit and letter between the two canonical letters.

(a) *The Severe Letter*

In 2 Corinthians 2:4 Paul refers to a letter (commonly known as the severe letter) which he wrote with many tears, demanding the punishment of an offender, and in 7:8 he says that he half regretted writing it because of the pain it would cause. Some scholars have argued that 1 Corinthians is too calm to fit this description. This is a misunderstanding of Paul's character. According to Acts 20:31 during his stay in Ephesus he 'did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears'. If his normal ministry was so tearful, a letter rebuking

<sup>24</sup> See below, p. 17.

a church for lawsuits, immorality, drunkenness at the Lord's Supper, party spirit and general lack of love, and demanding the excommunication of one of Paul's spiritual children, would be much more tearful.

(b) *The Offender*

A more serious question is whether the offender who has been punished by the church, and who Paul writes should now be forgiven lest Satan gain an advantage over them (2 Cor. 2:5ff.), is the same as the offender whom Paul tells the church to hand over to Satan in 1 Corinthians 5. Most scholars reject this identification, and raise two objections.<sup>25</sup>

Firstly, that Paul treats the question of the offender as the dominant issue of the severe letter when he refers to it in 2 Corinthians, whereas the discipline of the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians is only one issue among many.

Secondly, that the man referred to in the severe letter had offended Paul personally, whereas the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5 had not.

To which it can be replied: the former objection is not of great weight. Even if the case of the incestuous man were only one isolated issue among others, the handing over to Satan of one of Paul's spiritual children would inevitably bulk larger in his mind than other matters. It is ironic that while some scholars deny that I Corinthians can be the severe letter because it mentions other matters besides the offender, others are willing to regard 2 Corinthians 10-13 as part of the severe letter, although there the offender is not even mentioned.

The second objection rests on a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 5. The case of incest was not merely a private offence affecting the man and his family. It was an open defiance by one of Paul's opponents of his apostolic tradition. This tradition (παράδοσις) which Paul handed on to all his churches included teaching on the Lord's Supper (11:23) and the resurrection of Christ (15:3), and also principles of moral behaviour. He writes to the Thessalonians: 'you received (παρελάβετε) from us how you ought to behave', and the most prominent item in this moral tradition, as he goes on to describe it, is

<sup>25</sup> Other minor objections are thoroughly discussed and answered by P. E. Hughes, *op. cit.*, 59-65.

abstaining from fornication (1 Thes. 4). This tradition, including the prohibition of fornication, is described in 1 Corinthians 4:17 as 'my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere', and he has sent Timothy to remind them of these ways because they were neglecting them.

Just as the prohibition of fornication was a prominent element in Paul's tradition, the practice of fornication was a prominent element in the Corinthian defiance of Paul's tradition.<sup>26</sup> And the case of incest is treated by Paul as an extreme example of fornication (5:1)—it was the theory that 'all things are allowable' taken to its logical extreme, in conscious defiance of Paul.

The element of defiance appears even more clearly in Paul's comment that they were 'puffed up' about the case of incest (5:2). The word *φουσιοῦμαι* is almost peculiar to 1 Corinthians in Paul's letters,<sup>27</sup> and always refers to the arrogance of his opponents. It is used three times in chapter 4 of the boasting of the parties and their leaders that they are superior to each other and to Paul; in chapter 8 Paul says that, knowledge puffs up, with reference to Christians who ate idol-food because they had knowledge, and despised those who abstained; and in chapter 13, where Paul shows how love is superior to all the gifts valued by his opponents, he says that love does not get puffed up. Similarly in chapter 5 the Corinthians are puffed up about the case of incest because it demonstrated the freedom from moral restraints, and particularly from the tradition of behaviour taught by Paul, which their wisdom had brought them.

The case of incest was thus a test-case in their relations with Paul. If he was too scared to take action (as they hoped he would be) even against such a flagrant act of immorality, that would be a decisive victory for their antinomian position. We may paraphrase 5:2: 'instead of feeling indignation, which you would do if you followed the tradition which I taught and showed you, you are puffed up and proud of your new wisdom, which enables you to oppose me, and flout the accepted standards even of the Gentiles.'

We must not forget that to reject Paul's teaching meant to

<sup>26</sup> See above p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> It occurs six times in 1 Cor., and once in the other letters.

reject Paul as a person. Like the Rabbis, Paul taught by example as well as by precept.<sup>28</sup> 'Be imitators of me', he writes, 'as I am of Christ.' 'Though you have countless pedagogues in Christ, you do not have many fathers. . . . I urge you therefore, be imitators of me' (11:1 and 4:15f.). Like a natural father Paul taught not so much a system of doctrine for his children to learn, as a way of life for his children to follow, which he demonstrated in his own life as a kind of living visual aid. Timothy was to remind them of his ways, as he taught in every church—the example and the precept being the same (4:17). To reject Paul as a teacher was to reject him as a man.

The case of incest was therefore both the offence of an individual against his own father, and also part of the defiance of Paul by his enemies. Now this is precisely the situation implied by Paul's remark in 2 Corinthians 7:12—that he wrote not so much for the sake of the offender or the offended party, but 'in order that your zeal for us might be revealed to you'. The offence of the incestuous man, and the defiant attitude that lay behind it, had undermined the relationship of father and children which had previously existed between Paul and the Corinthians, and the most important effect of their repentance and punishment of the offender was to restore that relationship.

(c) *The Cancelled Visit*

The first charge which Paul rebuts in 2 Corinthians is that of fickleness. Apparently he had promised to visit them, and then failed to do so, and his opponents accused him of being unreliable, saying one thing and doing another (1:17). He replies that he postponed his visit because he did not want to visit them with sorrow to exercise discipline, and had therefore written them a letter instead. This letter, then, was a substitute for a visit the Corinthians were expecting (2:1-3).

Now I Corinthians is precisely this—a substitute for a visit. The Corinthians had been expecting a visit from Paul for some

<sup>28</sup> The teaching method of the Jewish Rabbis is described as follows by B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, C. W. K. Gleerup, Lund (1961) 183: 'the pupil is a witness to his teacher's words; he is a witness to his actions as well. He does not only say, "I heard from my teacher" but "I saw my teacher do this or that".'

time. 'Some of you', he writes, 'have become puffed up in the belief that I am not coming' (4:18)—in other words, they interpreted his failure to visit them as a sign that he was scared of them. But when he announces his future travel plans in chapter 16, he says that he will go to Macedonia not *via* Corinth, but *via* Troas. The reason he gives for taking this route—that he does not want to see them in passing, but to spend some time with them—must have seemed to the Corinthians very unsatisfactory. Why should he not see them both in passing and also on the return journey? Such an announcement would naturally lead to the charge of fickleness, and to Paul's stating the real reason for his change of plan in 2 Corinthians.

Scholars who deny that 1 Corinthians is the severe letter can follow one of two approaches:

1. They can claim that the charge of fickleness in cancelling his proposed visit, which Paul faces in 2 Corinthians, refers to the announcement of his future plans in 1 Corinthians 16, although a visit has in fact been paid since that announcement was made. But the way Paul treats this charge makes it clear that it was a red-hot issue, and reflected the immediate reaction of the Corinthians on hearing of his change of plan.

2. They can assume that the cycle recurred. During or after, the painful visit, Paul again promised to visit Corinth, and again failed to fulfil his promise. The difficulty with this theory is that the promise was made at a time when relations were good, and a happy visit was anticipated (2 Cor. 1:14-16). We cannot therefore place this promise at the time of the painful visit which is supposed to have taken place between 1 and 2 Corinthians. Nor was there any reconciliation after the supposed painful visit, when this promise could have been made. It is in fact very difficult not to regard the fickleness charge in 2 Corinthians as a direct reference to 1 Corinthians 16, and as the immediate reaction of the Corinthians to the travel plan there announced.

(d) *Paul's Second Visit to Corinth*

In 2 Corinthians 13:1, 2 Paul says he will shortly pay a third visit to Corinth, and gives a series of parallels between what he said on his second visit, and what he is saying now:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| I said before   | and say now  |
| when present for the second<br>time                             | now that I am absent   |
| to the previous sinners<br>( <i>sc.</i> that I would not spare) | to all the rest<br>that on my next visit I will<br>not spare |

Reading the columns vertically, Paul said on his second visit to those who had sinned before that he would not spare, and now repeats this warning to the rest. When did this second visit take place? If I Corinthians is the severe letter it must have taken place before I Corinthians. Is there, then, any evidence that before I Corinthians Paul had visited Corinth, and had occasion to rebuke and warn certain sinners?

At first sight, I Corinthians seems to mark the beginning of the trouble. Part of I Corinthians is an answer to questions raised by the Corinthians in a letter they had sent; and part is based on what he had heard from Chloe's household.<sup>29</sup> But it is clear from 5:9-13 that there had been trouble before that. He had written an earlier letter (commonly known as the 'previous letter'), telling them not to mix with fornicators. They had taken this to refer only to pagan fornicators, but Paul replies: 'in fact what I wrote to you was not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality' (5:11).<sup>30</sup> Paul must have discovered even before the previous letter that certain Corinthian Christians were practising immorality, and he wrote that letter to demand their excommunication. The news that Chloe's household brought was that (i) Paul's opponents at Corinth had deliberately misinterpreted his letter; (ii) far from heeding his warnings, they were boasting of a case of incest more blatant than anything committed before; (iii) the various false teachers had gathered individual followers who were now in open rivalry with each other.

The first stage in the conflict, therefore, was the confronta-

<sup>29</sup> See J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, 93, for a division of 1 Cor. into these two parts.

<sup>30</sup> The word  $\nu\upsilon\nu$  'serves to contrast the real state of affairs with an unreal conditional clause' (*Arndt s.v.*)—in this verse, with the 'if that were so' implied in  $\alpha\tilde{\rho}\alpha$  (verse 10). Cf. 1 Cor. 7:14, where also the antecedent of  $\nu\upsilon\nu$  is the implied conditional in  $\alpha\tilde{\rho}\alpha$ . RSV text 'but rather I wrote' is thus better than RSV margin 'but now I write'.

tion with Paul over the immorality of certain Christians, which was probably based, as in 1 Corinthians 6, on gnostic antinomian teaching. Paul's second visit must have fallen at this stage. He wrote the previous letter after returning to Ephesus from the second visit. I Corinthians marks the second stage in the conflict, and deals with the party spirit and other troubles reported by Chloe's household. It is interesting that these two stages are clearly distinguished in 2 Corinthians also. In 2 Corinthians 12:19-21 Paul writes that he is afraid of two things:

1. When he comes, he may perhaps find (μή πως ἐλθὼν . . . εὔρω) party spirit, puffed-upness, and disorders. These are the things he learnt by hearsay from Chloe's household, and therefore mentions in this hypothetical way.

2. Again when he comes God may humble him, and he may mourn many of those who had previously sinned and not repented of their immorality (μή πάλιν ἐλθόντος μου . . . πενθήσω πολλούς τῶν προημαρτηκότων). Here Paul is not being hypothetical. He remembers how on his second visit God humbled him and he mourned over certain sinners. On that occasion the sin was immorality.

Again in 13:2 Paul distinguishes between the 'previous sinners' (προημαρτηκότες) whom he warned on his second visit, and the rest whom he has heard about later. The term 'previous sinners' is used in both places because their sin—immorality—came at an earlier stage than the sins of the rest—party spirit, puffed-upness and disorders. Thus the immorality, and the second visit when Paul rebuked it, took place around the time of the previous letter; whilst the party spirit, puffed-upness and disorders, which were the sins of 'the rest', were the subject-matter of 1 Corinthians.

Why, then, it may be asked, does Paul refer to the second visit in 2 Corinthians, but never in 1 Corinthians? There were two reasons for mentioning this visit in 2 Corinthians:

It was, he explains, the bitter memory of that visit, and fear that its unpleasantness might be repeated, that made him change his plan, and go to Macedonia *via* Troas rather than *via* Corinth (2:1). In 1 Corinthians, where he is trying to be as conciliatory as possible, he does not mention this, but states that he does not want to visit them in passing (16:7). When

the Corinthians refuse to accept this reason, and accuse him of fickleness, he is forced to explain the real reason for his change of plan by reference to the second visit.

The second visit was the main ground of his opponents' accusation that 'his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account' (2 Cor. 10:10). It was also the ground of his opponents' belief that he was too scared to dare visit them again (1 Cor. 4:18). Therefore in answering the charge of weakness, Paul asserts that the threats he made on his second visit he will carry out on his third (2 Cor. 13:1-3). The greater prominence of the theme of strength and weakness in 2 Corinthians, and the conciliatory tone of 1 Corinthians are the reasons why this point is made in the second letter rather than the first.

### 3. PAUL'S METHOD OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

In this final section I shall first discuss the reason for the differences in emotional tone between the various parts of the Corinthian correspondence, and then trace through the two letters the outworking of Paul's method of church discipline.

#### (a) *The Logical Sequence of the Corinthian Correspondence*

There are two features of 1 Corinthians which are in marked contrast with 2 Corinthians—Paul does not refer to his opponents directly, but only under the disguise mentioned in 4:6; and he discusses every issue with patient, logical argument, sympathizing as much as possible with the point of view of his opponents.<sup>31</sup> In 2 Corinthians, however, he attacks his opponents both directly and personally. The reason for this contrast is that when he wrote 1 Corinthians Paul was in a very dangerous position. Both his person and his teaching were being attacked, and a large proportion of the church were listening to the new teaching. Paul has to deal with the case of incest, which was a test-case; but for the rest he tries to be as conciliatory as possible. It is only when Titus has brought good news of the response of the church to 1 Corinthians that

<sup>31</sup> H. Chadwick, *NTS* 1 (1954-5) 261ff. shows how in 1 Cor. 7 and in Galatians makes such an effort to sympathize with a viewpoint he himself rejects that in Galatia he is accused of being a trimmer.

he dares to launch the frontal attack on his opponents which we see in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

2 Corinthians falls naturally into three sections. The main theme of the first section (chapters 1-7) is announced in 1:12-14—a justification of the ministry of Paul and his colleagues. This section contains the good news brought by Titus, that they had punished the offender and proved themselves guiltless in the matter (7:11), so that Paul can write: 'I rejoice, because I have perfect confidence in you' (7:16). But the central part of this section (2:14-7:4) is, as D. Georgi has pointed out, almost entirely polemical.<sup>32</sup> Verses such as 3:1, 6:11-13 and 7:2-4 show that all was far from well in the attitude of the Corinthians to Paul. The difference between chapters 1-7 and 10-13 is that in the former Paul makes a general defence of the ministry of himself and his colleagues, whereas in the latter he makes a personal defence of himself as an individual against personal attacks.

The distinction between 'I' and 'we' is not always clear in Paul's writings, but he goes out of his way to draw it in this letter.<sup>33</sup> The 'we' of 1:19 is defined as 'me and Silvanus and Timothy', and is contrasted with an emphatic 'I' in 1:23. Paul thereby divides his defence against the charge of fickleness into two parts: that we apostles are reliable, because the Christ we preach is reliable (1:15-22); and that I Paul was pure in my motives for postponing my visit (1:23f.). Similarly his defence of the apostolic ministry is in two parts: the theological basis of that ministry as it is exercised by himself and his colleagues (2:14-7:4); and his personal reply to personal attacks on him as an individual (10-13). The opening words of 10:1, αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος, can only mean 'I Paul as an individual', and are in contrast to the more general defence earlier in the letter, just as the ἐγὼ δὲ of 1:23 is in contrast with the words 'Silvanus, Timothy and I' in 1:19.

Thus the three sections of 2 Corinthians are:

1. A defence of the apostolic ministry of Paul and his colleagues, set within the framework of comment on the news Titus brought from Corinth (chapters 1-7).

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, 22. Georgi himself thinks that 2:14-7:4 must belong to a separate letter from the rest of chapters 1-7.

<sup>33</sup> See A. T. Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry*, SCM, London (1961) 49ff.

2. The collection (chapters 8 and 9).
3. Paul's defence of himself as an individual against personal attacks.

(b) *The Importance of Reasoned Argument*

The Corinthians were defying both Paul as a person and the tradition which he taught. This interrelation of personal and doctrinal issues is typical of church disputes. Greenslade, in his study of schism in the early church, says that 'the personal factor is always important, but rarely, if ever, the sole cause of schism'.<sup>34</sup> There is always some doctrinal conviction involved. 'Conviction is sometimes rationalisation, or genuine belief and a factious spirit may co-exist'.<sup>35</sup> Where there is a genuine belief; it is useless to rebuke the factious spirit and ignore the belief; and even if the conviction is a rationalization, it remains a conviction and must be treated as such. Abuse of the opposition is no substitute for an honest treatment of their beliefs.

In I Corinthians Paul deals at length with the beliefs of the opposition, and personal criticism comes mainly in the second letter. This does not prove, as J. C. Hurd claims, that when the first letter was written the opposing teachers had not yet arrived.<sup>36</sup> It proves rather Paul's conviction that false ideas must be met by rational argument. 'I speak to sensible men,' he writes, 'judge for yourselves what I say' (10:15). He feels free to make a personal attack on his opponents in 2 Corinthians only because the majority of the church has been won over by the sympathetic teaching in I Corinthians.

(c) *Congregational Discipline*

Paul is convinced that the incestuous man must be punished; but it is the local congregation who must do the punishing (5:4, 5). Christians, who will one day judge angels, are the fit people to exercise discipline over their own members (6:2, 3). As he explains later, his main reason for not visiting Corinth was that he did not want to have to exercise discipline himself; and thus come to them with sorrow (2 Cor. 2:1-4). He took a

<sup>34</sup> S. L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church*, SCM, London (1953) 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.*, 214

considerable risk in leaving them to exercise their own discipline. He had already been taunted with weakness (1 Cor. 4:8, 18), and he knew that his enemies would regard this as further evidence of his weakness—as indeed they did (2 Cor. 10:10). His mental agitation while waiting to hear of their reaction to 1 Corinthians shows how well aware he was of the risk he took (2 Cor. 2:13 and 7:5). But to an autocratic exercise of his apostolic authority he preferred the more risky method of teaching and persuasion and leaving them to exercise their own discipline.

In 2 Corinthians, encouraged by their response to the first letter and punishment of the offender, Paul launches an all-out attack on the opposing teachers. But even then he prefaces it with seven chapters of teaching, in which he states the theological basis of the apostolic ministry, and contrasts it with the ministry of his opponents. He is anxious that the Corinthians should oppose these teachers not just out of loyalty to him, but because they were convinced in their minds of the falseness of the new teaching. To use a military metaphor, chapters 10-13 are the infantry attack on a position softened by the artillery fire of chapters 1-7.

#### (d) *The Concept of Obedience*

The key to Paul's approach to church discipline is his concept of obedience. He wrote the severe letter to test whether the Corinthians were 'obedient in all things' (2 Cor. 2:9); and he writes that he is ready to punish every act of disobedience 'when your obedience is complete' (10:6). In Paul's letters obedience is normally due either to God, or to 'the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thes. 1:8); 'the pattern of teaching' (Rom. 6:17); 'the teaching you learnt' (Rom. 16:17-19); 'our word' (2 Thes. 3:14). The reason for this obedience is seen in the two latter passages, which contain warnings against those who 'create divisions and stumbling-blocks contrary to the teaching you learnt' (Rom. 16:17), and who 'behave with disorder and not according to the tradition you received from us' (2 Thes. 3:6). Obedience to the gospel teaching begins with conversion and baptism, so that Paul can write to the Romans (6:17) that they 'obeyed the pattern of teaching and became slaves of righteousness'; but this initial obedience leads on to a

continuing obedience, so that he can write to the Philippians (2:12): 'as you have always obeyed . . . much more now'. Obedience is thus a continuing loyalty to the gospel teachings, of which Paul is the minister.

When, therefore, Paul wrote the severe letter to test whether they were obedient in all things, it was their faithfulness to his tradition which was at issue.<sup>37</sup> And when he writes that he will avenge every act of disobedience when their obedience is complete, he means that he will only enforce conformity to his tradition when he is sure that the church as a whole is convinced that his tradition is right. The principle stated in 2 Corinthians 10:6 is that church discipline is not a means of enforcing obedience, but an outcome of the church's obedience. That obedience is secured, not (if at all possible) by the use of apostolic authority, but by patient and sympathetic teaching.

We can thus distinguish three stages in the attitude of the Corinthians:

1. *Disobedience*. This was the situation described in 1 Corinthians 4:8: 'without us You have become kings'; 5:6: 'your boasting is not good' ; and throughout 1 Corinthians—a wilful defiance of Paul's teaching, and thereby of Paul himself.

2. *Partial obedience*. This was the stage Titus reported. They had accepted Paul's words about the offender, and shown themselves guiltless 'in the matter' (2 Cor. 7:11). But the influence of his opponents was still strong. Paul is more confident in 2 Corinthians, but for most of the letter is still on the defensive.

3. *Complete obedience*. This is the stage Paul hopes they will reach by his next visit, after reading 2 Corinthians. Only then, when their obedience is complete, will he punish, the disobedient (10:6). This discipline will not mean Paul exercising his apostolic authority against a rebellious and recalcitrant congregation. It will be the action of the congregation itself, in willing obedience to Paul and his teaching, against those of the original trouble-makers who have refused to repent (12:21).

Had Paul used the abusive language of 2 Corinthians 10-13

<sup>37</sup> There is one passage in the New Testament (Phm. 21) where Paul talks of obedience to a particular request, and this might seem to be a parallel to a request for the punishment of a particular offender. But the severe letter was written to test their obedience in *all things*, which must mean to his teaching in general.

at the time of I Corinthians, he would have split the church. By his patient and sympathetic approach at the beginning he built up and unified the church. This was how he exercised the authority which the Lord had given him 'for building up and not for tearing down'.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> 2 Cor. 13:10.